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ABSTRACT

Despite the strategic position the community college administrator occupies within the institution, there appears to be no definitive statement of administrative freedom and responsibility comparable to that available to faculty members. This is particularly surprising since many administrators are recruited from the ranks of faculty members, where they have historically enjoyed the support of academic freedom and tenure. This support, articulated and defended by the American Association of University Professors, has, despite abuses, assured freedom of teaching and research, as well as the economic security necessary in making the profession attractive to persons of ability. Although these tenets of freedom and tenure may not apply specifically to the administrative endeavor, it is generally accepted that administrators should be free to seek the truth in their specialty, carry out the duties prescribed in their job descriptions, and implement decisions consistent with governing board policy. While the American Association of University Administrators has adopted a statement of Professional Standards for Administrators in Higher Education, this statement focuses primarily on the university setting. A statement of principles emanating from the national level would help clarify the issue of administrative freedom and deter the erosion of authority and influence currently experienced by college administrators. (JP)

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ADMINISTRATIVE FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A PROPOSAL

By Robert C. Cloud

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OVERVIEW

Much has been written and said about the freedoms necessary to the community college enterprise. Teachers must be assured complete freedom in their teaching, research, and publication activities. Students have the right to learn and develop in an atmosphere of openness and free inquiry. Members of the governing board must retain enough freedom to carry out their statutory and institutional responsibilities. These dimensions of institutional freedom have been addressed in varying degrees by statements of teacher's organizations, federal court decisions, and the professional literature, and without doubt they will continue to receive the attention of the legal and professional communities.

Perhaps less has been written about the freedom of the administrator than others in the American two-year college. The effective community college administrator is a manager, an educational leader, a public relations expert, and a scholar. He occupies a strategic position in the institution, one requiring professional freedom equal to that for the teacher. Yet there appears to be no definitive statement of administrative freedom and responsibility comparable to that available for faculty in the two-year colleges.

THE PROPOSAL

Academic freedom is an essential and time-honored principle in the teaching profession. Faculty consider academic freedom to be an indispensable part of their job, because it enables the teacher-scholar to carry on teaching, research, and publication without undue restraints or interference. Stated in its simplest terms, academic freedom is the freedom of the teacher within his field of study to seek the truth and present the facts as he perceives them. First codified by the American Association of University Professors in 1915, academic freedom was based on the following premises:

1. that it was a necessary condition for the university's existence,
2. that in the classroom professors were limited by the norms of competence and neutrality,
3. that outside the university professors had the same rights of utterance and action as other citizens, limited only by professional decorum, and
4. that academic freedom was not academic license.[2]

The principle of academic freedom, updated by the AAUP in its 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and later embraced by all segments of higher education, is complemented by the equally important concept of academic tenure. Referred to by some authorities in higher education as the handmaiden of academic freedom, tenure has been defined as a means to specific ends: namely (1) freedom of teaching, research, and extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic

security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability.[3] In theory, tenure is an expectation of continued employment, of relative permanence that grows with each year of service. In practice, tenure has come to denote a procedure which must be followed before a teacher is dismissed.

Perhaps the best argument for guaranteeing academic freedom and tenure to satisfactory community college teachers is that the quality of their performance and service is improved. Proponents maintain that so long as a reasonable amount of job security and professional freedom are lacking, faculty cannot do their best work, and the institution suffers. By relieving teachers of their anxiety regarding freedom to teach and retention in their positions, supporters say that academic freedom and tenure undergird the educational process.

Critics respond that abuses of academic freedom are possible and, in fact, have occurred on many campuses. This would appear to be true to observers of higher education, and many community college administrators can relate instances where incompetent or irresponsible faculty on their campuses seem to have been protected to an inordinate degree by academic freedom and tenure policies. Tenure, as it is interpreted and administered on too many campuses, is tantamount to sinecure, say its detractors.[4]

The relatively few instances of abuse notwithstanding, the fact is that academic freedom and tenure have enabled the American community college to realize much of its potential in this century by insuring the right of faculty to the search for truth and its free and open exposition. The integrity of both principles must be (and will be) preserved if

community college education is to experience continued growth and development in the years to come.

In its stricter or narrower sense, academic freedom has reference only to the teacher and the collectivity of teachers, the faculty.[5] It is interesting that the principle has not been extended in the same degree to those in community college administrative positions. This is particularly surprising since many administrators are recruited from the ranks of the faculty, where they have enjoyed the support of academic freedom and tenure provisions.[6] Yet no statement of principles for community college administrators exists which would compare with the AAUP's Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure. The American Association of University Administrators has adopted a statement of Professional Standards for Administrators in Higher Education (1975) which serves as a benchmark against which practice is measured. As a consequence of the Statement, the AAUA has investigated alleged poor practice, counseled the parties involved, and advocated the best principles for higher education administrators. However, the statement appears to have been developed primarily with the university setting in mind, and it has not received wide distribution or endorsement in the two-year college environment. Perhaps this document and others like it can serve as models in the preparation of a statement of standards for administrators in the two-year sector of higher education.

One wonders why the American Association of Community Junior Colleges, the President's Academy of AACJC, or administrators themselves, acting through a task force, have not developed such a position paper for the guidance and protection of those in the field. Granted that all of the tenets of academic freedom and tenure may not apply specifically to the administrative endeavor.

Few, however, would disagree that the spirit inherent in these concepts is appropriate to the administrative realm. Administrators should be free to seek and espouse the truth in their specialty; they have the right and responsibility to carry out the duties prescribed in their job descriptions; and they have the responsibility to make and implement decisions consistent with governing board policy and state and federal statutes.

In recent times we have seen a gradual, but steady, reduction in the authority and influence of those in administrative and management positions. This erosion of authority has occurred at all levels in the society, has been particularly pronounced in the public institutions, and has been accompanied by a sharing of authority with personnel throughout the organization. Accountability and responsibility, however, remain concentrated at the leadership levels. Given this situation, it is not surprising that many talented professionals opt not to seek a leadership role. Hemphill has demonstrated that a potential leader must believe that he has a reasonable chance of succeeding, or he will decline the responsibility.[7] The number of instructors who turn down the opportunity to become department chairmen or deans is fairly large,[8] and that number will increase unless an effort is made to codify the role and scope of community college administration. There does appear to be a shortage of qualified leaders for the community colleges.[9] Rarely, however, is there a dearth of individuals eager to assume leadership positions, and this, of course, places the profession and all of higher education at peril.

In summary, a statement of principles emanating at the national level would clarify the authority, freedom, and responsibilities of two-year

college administrators. Such a paper could serve to support and protect those already in service and encourage those with potential to join an exciting and challenging, yet beleaguered, profession. Is anyone interested?

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October 20, 1980

Footnotes

1. N. Dean Evans and Ross L. Neagley, Planning and Developing Innovative Community Colleges (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973). pp. 51-59.

2. Richard Hofstadter and Walter Metzger, The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957. p. 480.

3. American Association of University Professors, Report of the Association, 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure (Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Professors, 1940).

4. John R. Silber. "Tenure in Context." Chapter 3 in The Tenure Debate, Bardwell L. Smith and Associates, pp. 34-35. Jossey-Bass, Inc. Publishers, 1973.

5. Robert MacIver, Academic Freedom in our Time (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955). p. 9.

6. Sidney Hook, In Defense of Academic Freedom (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. Publishers, 1971). p. 13.

7. J. K. Hemphill "Why People Attempt to Lead." Leadership and Interpersonal Behavior, L. Petrullo and B. M. Bass, eds. pp. 201-205. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961.

8. Fred E. Fiedler and Martin Chemers, Leadership and Effective Management (Glenview: Illinois: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1974). p. 13.

9. Fred E. Fiedler and Martin Chemers, op. cit., p. 13.

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